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## IS OUR ART ONLY A FASHION?

NOTWITHSTANDING the creditable progress made in this country during the past three or four years toward the improvement of the public taste in art matters, the assertion is sometimes made that "the art craze" is nothing more than an imported fashion which will run its course like any other fashion. However unpalatable such a reflection as this may be to those of our readers who know the sincerity of their motives, it is so suggestive that it is, we think, worthy of our serious consideration.

Art societies have sprung up all over the country. It is the fashion to talk about art and, in a fashionable way, to practise it. Young ladies, instead of spending their mornings at the piano, practising their "scales," or trying to cultivate voices of indefinite quality and quantity, as they used to do, take lessons in painting on china, in oils, or water-colors, or ply their nimble fingers in the production of "art needlework." The boys are not far behind in their pursuit of artistic occupations; albeit that the number of them who aspire to become painters and sculptors is suggestively disproportionate to the opportunities they will find of practising those professions. The tradesmen of the better class in our large cities now all talk art, and not a few of them show practical appreciation of its commercial advantages. They have long since hidden in cellars or garrets, or spirited to the backwood regions, the stereotyped flimsy black walnut and gilt furniture of bad construction and worse "decoration," the heavy, formal gingerbread cornices, and artificially disposed draperies; the vulgarly colored carpets with shaded ribbons and natural flowers; the spotty, "sprigged" wall-papers, with longitudinal relief patterns, and the hopelessly ugly marble, or—worse still—cast-iron mantelpieces of inane design. In place of these they give us furniture of substantial make after models long forgotten, but none the less excellent; natural draperies for curtains, and portières depending from simple brass rods; carpets and wall-papers flat and conventional in treatment of design and harmonious in color—adapted from the best oriental examples; and good old-fashioned wooden mantelpieces, unpretentious and inexpensive for the moderate purse, and carved ones with tiled hearths and facings, and brass and iron fire-irons and fenders for those who can afford them. Everywhere we find the improved public taste in domestic art matters reflected in the homes of the better class of the community, and consequently in the shops of the cabinet-maker, the upholsterer, and the decorator.

The public leads and the trade follows. The supply answers the demand. So long as the public was satisfied with the former order of things the trade took little pains to induce it to adopt any better. That we have made a great stride in the direction of art progress doubtless is largely due to the movement in that direction brought about in England by such men as Eastlake, Dresser, and Morris. The most intelligent and influential persons there aided it and speedily caused it to become the fashion. As a fashion it was first introduced into this country. Whether it will continue merely as such depends upon ourselves. If we are satisfied simply to trifle with art, making a dalliance with it an excuse for frittering away our time without taking the trouble even to acquaint ourselves with its first principles, we may assist the cheap furniture man in selling his stock of "Queen Anne cabinets," "Renaissance chairs," or "early English tables"—whatever the latter expression may mean—and the wall-paper man his "artistic dados and friezes;" but we shall accomplish little more. We have begun well because we have imported from England ready-made her best architects' best ideas on the subject of domestic art. Whether we shall continue well depends upon what direction we ourselves give the work of the cabinet-maker, the upholsterer, and the decorator. If left to their own devices, these gentry will probably go on improving upon what they know about art until in the end we shall be worse off than we were before our art growth began. If we have profited by the fashion of art, we shall have cultivated the art perception which comes to all persons of culture, and shall know at a glance what is good from what is meretricious. Knowing what is good, we shall demand it of our tradesmen, and if there must be a fashion in art it will be the very desirable one of the best workmanship and the best design in every article used for the furnishing and adornment of our homes.

It may be fairly claimed, however, that we have already passed through the first stage of art growth—the fashionable imitative stage—and that there are healthful signs of the development of a genuine and permanent American school of art, having for its basis strong and original work. Mr. Louis C. Tiffany has produced stained glass of high artistic value. Mrs. Candace Wheeler has a little school of art embroidery from which she sends out work that rivals the best examples of the Royal School at South Kensington. In artistic silverware, Tiffany & Co. stand unrivalled for originality of design and beauty of workmanship. In ceramics, the achievements of Messrs. J. & J. G. Low, Miss McLaughlin, and Mr. Charles Volkmar are highly creditable. In wood engraving, under the fostering care of Messrs. Scribner & Co. and Messrs. Harper & Brothers, the United States has achieved wonders. Our etchers are doing good and original work, and in painting we certainly have no cause to blush when Philadelphia can send a Picknell to surprise the giants of the Paris Salon and the Bostonians a Mark Fisher to rank among the foremost exhibitors at the Royal Academy and the Grosvenor Gallery.

With such encouraging signs of vitality at home, we think it may be asserted with confidence that, however much our interest in art may have originated in fashion, or owe its stimulus to it, there is a firm foundation beneath it all which augurs favorably for the future. We must take care, however, not to incur the imputation that the interest in art in this country is only a fashion. Fashion is a good thing in its way, but in relation to art the word is detestable in its familiar application in the trade sense. A true work of art, be it a statue, a painting, a table, or a piece of embroidery, will be as much a work of art a thousand years hence as it is to-day. Fashion cannot change it. If it be good it will be so always. Let the reader then, in furnishing his home and in making purchases for its adornment, be careful to admit in it nothing but what is excellent in color, design and execution. It will then never be out of date, and only a very ignorant person would think meanly of its appointments because they are not changed each year with the advent of the spring or fall, to keep pace with the last new bonnet or mantilla.

## DI CESNOLA AND HIS TRUSTEES.

How long, we wonder, will the trustees of the Metropolitan Museum consent to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for their disingenuous director. It would seem incredible, if we did not know it to be true, that honorable gentlemen should silently assent to the disreputable practices that disgrace the museum. Almost under their very eyes alterations are being made in objects of the Cesnola collection, in the hopeless endeavor to disprove Mr. Feuardent's charges in *THE ART AMATEUR*. Fortunately for the interests of truth, various photographs of the objects in dispute taken at various times are coming to light, to the confusion of these shameless attempts at falsification. We have never doubted that the American spirit of fairness would eventually secure Mr. Feuardent's vindication and the disgrace of his unprincipled assailants. The time for this, we believe, is near at hand. Our contemporary, *The Nation*, whose powerful influence on the side of right has too long been withheld, is at last, we are glad to see, awaking to the necessity of "vindicated the trustworthiness of the (Cesnola) collection by an adequate explanation of the existence of these photographs." In the meanwhile, *The Times* continues to drive sledge-hammer blows and tries to shame the trustees into doing their duty. "Mr. Feuardent's circumstantial indictment," says the editor, "amounts to a charge against 'General' Di Cesnola of obtaining money by false pretences," and if allowed to pass without challenge "must place Di Cesnola in the category of impostors, and must discredit every enterprise with which he is prominently identified. The testimony against the honesty of the methods pursued in the museum is cumulative, convincing, apparently unanswerable."

ON the first page we give a glimpse of some of the paintings of the Paris Salon. Prominent among them is Bouguereau's "Morning," which has been bought by Mr. S. P. Avery. It is highly commended by *Galvani's Messenger* as "a delightfully poetic conception," "a delicately beautiful embodiment of purity and peace."

## THE VANDERBILT DRAWINGS.

HAD our Museum been fortunate enough to have had on its board of active trustees even one scholar of ordinary capacity and experience, it is safe to say the Vanderbilt Collection of Drawings would never have been accepted. I think it unlikely that it would even have been thought worth while to make a selection from them; always excepting the case (No. xxvii.) which contains architectural and decorative designs, among them not a few interesting drawings without regard to names. In the whole collection, indeed, the names of artists are the great stumbling-block. The drawings are bad enough in themselves, but the names make them seem much worse than they are.

If one simply reasons on the subject from the standpoint of common-sense, it will be seen that it is impossible a collection of six hundred and thirty-three drawings worth having, by the old masters, should at the present time be bought for this country. Of course the purchaser bought these at a bargain, for it is not likely he was so filled with enthusiasm as to give his agent a blank check. This being so, it follows that the collection cannot be what it promises, since original drawings of any merit by the artists whose names are attached to these need not be offered at a bargain to anybody. There is such an increased demand for them in our day, the number of rich competitors is so multiplied, the great Museums have absorbed so much of the supply, that the only reasonable thing for the owner of this collection to do with it, if he wished to sell it, would have been to send it to London or Paris to be sold at auction. Had it really been what we were assured beforehand it was, the sale of six hundred and odd such drawings would have been one of the celebrated sales of our time, and the happy owner would have retired on a fortune.

Let the visitor take his catalogue and look over the list of names. There are not absent a half dozen famous names, and among the famous we find two drawings attributed to Raphael, nine to Michael Angelo, eleven to Titian, twelve to Tintoretto, seven to Claude, nine to Rembrandt, eight to Del Sarto, seven to Paul Veronese—but why go on with the count? After all, the absurdity is not so much in the number of the drawings attributed to any one famous name as in the attributing such performances to such men at all. Look at the "Head for a Statue," No. 66, by Michael Angelo, or at No. 27, by the same "solitary giant in art history," as the catalogue calls him, "A Man seated on the Ground and looking upward." These two drawings alone are sufficient tests by which to judge the value of the attributions. The connoisseur who would allow his name to go forth as authority for such manifest impositions ought not to expect any consideration. But the saddling upon Dürer of a performance like No. 446, "Study for Engraving of the Knight" (this is only one instance of the careless preparation of the catalogue—the engraving meant is the "St. Hubert" or "St. Eustatius," as it is indifferently called)—the giving this to Dürer is inexcusable. It is a learner's attempt to copy the wonderful engraving; there is no trace of Dürer's method in the work. Worse even than this is the putting Lucas van Leyden's name, even with the saving interrogation-mark attached to it, to the seven timid copies of the master's series from the story of Queen Esther. The Martin Schoen and Murillo have changed numbers—454 should be 455—but as neither is by either, nor possibly could be, it makes but little matter. The Andrea Mantegna, No. 167, is a tracing or a copy of the well-known etching of one compartment of the "Triumph of Julius Cæsar," known to us as being published in heliotype in Osgood's series. The Leonardo da Vincis, Nos. 174 and 176, ought not to have even a question-mark after them; they are not even of Leonardo's school. The greatest discredit, however, attaches to the printing Leonardo's name in connection with No. 176. And what shall we say to the things given to Marc Antonio, Nos. 11 and 18? or to that ascribed to Masaccio, No. 22? or to Primaticcio's "Birds," No. 234? or—but we will let the rest of our queries sleep for the nonce. I fancy I see, on some day when the Museum is quite deserted—on any one of the free-days, for example—the Dutch pictures looking at the Vanderbilt drawings, as the two Roman augurs were imagined looking at one another. Or I fancy I hear the Director coming out of his room and looking, first at one purchase and then at the other. "These Americans

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will buy anything," he chuckles, and returns to his studies.

I have hinted at the carelessness of the catalogue. It is made up on the cramming plan, each artist's name preceded by a biographical sketch denuded of all interest and made up of jerky items; the characteristics of the artist constantly belied by the character of the drawing given as an example of his work. The very first number fails to point out the subject of the drawing—this, No. 1, "Figure Studies," as well as No. 55, "Two Nude Athletes," are studies for groups in Raphael's fresco, "La Disputa;" but neither of them is by the artist himself, nor is it likely they are by his scholars. The original of No. 1 is in the Städelschen Institute in Frankfort-on-the-Main, and the present drawing is probably a tracing of that one, since it is reversed. The Frankfort drawing shows the group as it is in the fresco. These are Raphael's naked models posing for the bishops, priests, and other personages in the fresco. The "Two Nude Athletes" of No. 55 are two other models posing for another group in the same fresco.

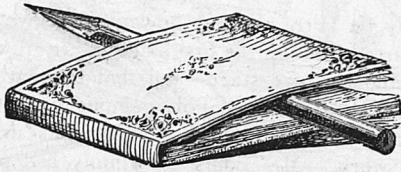
The one drawing, No. 2, attributed to Raphael is surely wrongly named. This "Figure of a Man with outstretched Arms about to plunge downward" is, I believe, a study of a crucified person, perhaps one of the thieves in the subject of the "Crucifixion of Christ." The "Raising of Jairus's Daughter," No. 393, absurdly ascribed to Tintoretto, must be something else, since I never remember seeing Christ represented with a monk's tonsure. No. 526, among the architectural drawings of the Roman school, is not a façade, but a design for stalls in a choir; Nos. 545 and 546 are not wall decorations, but a composition for one of the sarcophagus tomb-arrangements so common in Italy in the fifteenth century and earlier. The most singular mistake, however, is in calling No. 537, by Pannini, "Ruins at Rome." It is a drawing of buildings at Paris, erected by Louis XIV. The arch at the left is the Arch of St. Denis, the cupola behind is that of Val de Grace, and the fountain is the "Fontaine des Innocents." The long façade is perhaps the Ecole Militaire, begun by Louis XIV., but finished by Napoleon I. The other buildings, however, are unmistakable.

So much for the last contribution to the treasures of our Museum. And of what use, may I ask, of what interest can it be to any human being? The drawings are not authentic, nor can any conceivable reason be given in the majority of cases why the names attached to them should have been selected rather than others. Nothing can be learned of them, therefore, in regard to art in general or to the art of the particular masters whose memories are here so scurvily treated, and a duller collection was never seen. Whoever has spent golden hours in the galleries of the Uffizi or in the Louvre, and hoped for a continuance of the same sort of pleasure on a smaller scale in our Museum, is doomed to a ridiculous disappointment. Never did Mr. Di Cesnola, at all times economical of the truth, speak a truer word than when he said in The Evening Post (using Mr. Sheldon's pen), "There will be no hope for the Museum until we get some scholars on the board of trustees;" and he might have added, until we get some rich men who know too much of art themselves to be played upon by incompetent or dishonest dealers.

CLARENCE COOK.

SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY for June is an admirable art number. St. Gaudens' Farragut Monument is the subject of an interesting article strongly illustrated; and a notice of Bastien-Lepage is illustrated, insufficiently, by an admirable woodcut of a bas-relief portrait by St. Gaudens, a very carefully executed block by Cole of the principal figure in Bastien-Lepage's "Joan of Arc Listening to the Voices," and a very rough sketch of the whole picture. Cole's portrait of Lord Beaconsfield is one of his best works. J. C. Beard, M. J. Burns, and W. H. Gibson are particularly happy in their pictorial contributions this month.

ONE of the most remarkable pictures in the present Royal Academy Exhibition, according to The (London) World, is a portrait of two sisters by an eminent painter, and the most noticeable feature in the portraits is the young ladies' hair. "It may interest some people to know," Mr. Yates remarks, "that these flowing tresses owe their gloss and beauty to being washed every morning in champagne."



## My Note Book.



RT in oils on a gigantic scale for the country circus, the menagerie, and the itinerant museum of natural wonders, just at this time keeps the painters who devote themselves to this specialty as busy as an Academician on "varnishing day." A New York Sun reporter, who recently visited the Houston Street "studio" of the Raphael in this line gives an amusing account of what he saw. One artist was putting the finishing touches to the portrait of a "fat woman," who was flanked on either side by "a giant lamb made larger than an elephant," and "an indescribably huddled man who was born without arms, and with his legs in the most ridiculous positions, while his head grew out of his back in a manner altogether without precedent." The chef d'œuvre of the collection was a wonder which, if Mr. Hubert Herkomer could have seen it, would have made him wild with envy. His hoarding picture for the education of the people of London in size must be a mere trifle compared with it; while as to the artistic merit of the American artist's production—well, let me spare Mr. Herkomer's feelings. I would not willingly create any international unpleasantness on such a sacred subject as art. I may whisper across the Atlantic, however, that the dimensions of the American chef d'œuvre alluded to are twenty-two feet by nineteen feet. It is a marine subject, introducing among many other figures of colossal size, a lovely mermaid "drinking champagne from a small table, on the other side of which is a composite being of the other sex smoking a cigar and gazing at her tenderly." Sea-lions and dolphins swim complacently about them. The painting of the figures perhaps is not quite so severely academic as in those of Mr. Herkomer's hoarding picture, but I do not doubt that the production of our Houston Street artist is infinitely more amusing than Mr. Herkomer's, and will draw a larger crowd.

SERIOUSLY, Mr. Herkomer is doing a good work in attempting to counteract the vulgarizing influence of badly drawn, worse colored, and often indecent posters which disfigure our thoroughfares as they do those of England. His first cartoon is given in miniature in the May number of The Magazine of Art, and is one of the many attractive illustrations. Why should not commercial advertisements be equally attractive? If artists were employed to draw them, they might easily make them so. I verily believe that a profitable field is open for artists in this direction, and that if they would work for moderate pay for a while, there would soon be so much demand for their services that they could increase their prices, and advertisers would find it remunerative to pay them.

MR. CAMILLE PITON's successful experiment of applying "spatter-work" to china decoration, as detailed in the March number of THE ART AMATEUR, was noticed in the April number of The (London) Pottery Gazette, and already it is announced in the latter journal for May that it "has been tried in the (English) potteries with very interesting results." This is enterprising.

RECENTLY Mr. Willard, of Boston, was in New York, and some of his portraits were on view at a friend's studio. His portrait of Charles Sumner is a strong work, full of life and character. I was particularly impressed by the subtlety with which the artist, by truth of local color, expresses shade of temperament in this picture and in a portrait of a boy. A head of a young woman, not pleasant in subject, is especially noticeable for the uncommon skill with which the carnations are blended with the shadows of the face.

AN authentic cast of the features of the painter Gilbert Stuart, made when he was seventy years old, has lately come to light, and is on view in Mr. David Johnson's studio. It was taken by Browere, and his son owns it. A letter is extant in which Stuart commends the portrait bust of him by Browere, who, it is said, by the way, had a peculiarly convenient method of taking a complete cast from a living model with the eyes open. The secret, it is hinted, may be divulged in a forthcoming life of Browere.

IF this country does not produce good decorative artists it will certainly not be from lack of pecuniary incentive. That the demand is far in advance of the supply would seem evident from the many prize competitions launched during the past few months. Following the handsome awards of L. Prang & Co. came those of the Decorative Art Society of New York, the Decorative Art Society of Baltimore, and those of the enterprising publisher of The Metal Worker for designs for stoves. Warren, Fuller & Co. offer the handsome sum of two thousand dollars in prizes for wall-paper designs, and now an English firm of art publishers, S. Hildesheimer & Co., goes ahead of all predecessors by announcing a series of prizes amounting to two thousand pounds sterling. That this sum is divided into no less than forty prizes ought to stimulate our artists to their best endeavors; for some of them are sure to be awarded to American competitors. There are to be one of £150, two of £100, two of £75, five of £50, ten of £25, and in addition to these it is guaranteed that fifty sets of designs will be selected by Hildesheimer & Co. at £20 a set. It is gratifying to notice that such competent judges have been selected as G. D. Leslie and Briton Riviere, Royal Academicians, and W. Hagelberg, a leading art publisher of Berlin.

FREQUENTERS of Christie's famous auction rooms in London were astonished recently at the price paid there for a pair of soft paste Sèvres figures, about six inches high. Experts marked their catalogues £15, £25, £30; but the lot was knocked down for five hundred and thirty-five guineas (about \$2700), the purchase being, it is said, for Lord Rosebery. These same figures were sold by Rutter of Paris for 200 francs. It is strongly suspected that they were decorated at Menecy. Altogether this looks like a very remarkable case of one's enthusiasm getting the better of his judgment.

ANENT the first exhibition of the "Painter Etchers," now open in the Hanover Gallery in London, The Artist notices "with unfeigned alarm, quite unmistakable indications of the formation of a Whistler school." "Nothing could be more undesirable," the editor thinks, "than that this clever but disreputably careless artist should be imitated by a number of 'halfpenny Whistlers,' who can reproduce everything but that which entitles their master to rank as an artist." In this category is placed much of the work of our talented countryman, Mr. F. Duveneck. Mr. H. Farrar's large work "On the Hillside" is commended by The Artist as "very rich in tone and effective in composition." Mr. S. Parrish's "Belleville on the Passaic" is considered as perhaps the most pleasing of his six etchings. This peintre-graveur, the editor shrewdly guesses, is "a transatlantic artist, and in this case the Americans may be congratulated on their countryman."

SOME "old masters" which were knocked down at the Shaw sale at Leavitt's auction-rooms last year for next to nothing, but which the Museum authorities did not want at any price, actually are now deemed worthy of forming part of the new loan collection at the Museum. Among them is an alleged Murillo of great size. Verily the exhibition of such a production as the work of one of the greatest painters that the world has ever seen is educating the public with a vengeance.

AN American artist lately from Paris says that he knows it to be a favorite device of one of our picture importers to buy a painting from the studio of an eminent French master, nominally at a very high price, and make his American customer aware of the fact; but privately he receives other pictures from the master gratuitously to make up for his liberality.

MONTEZUMA.